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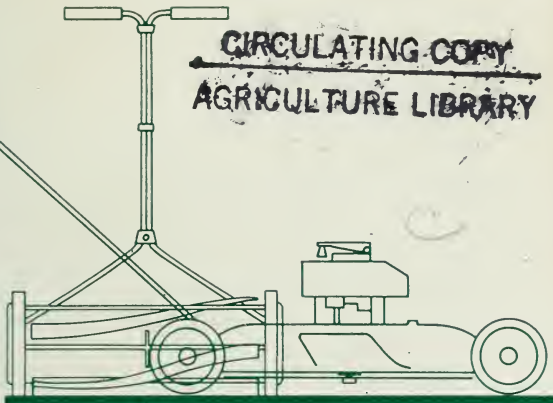

mowing your lawn

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

CIRCULAR 1050

DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING a good lawn requires proper mowing. By creating a dense, uniform surface, proper mowing enhances the aesthetic value of a lawn. Mowing also helps in the fight against weeds, since new grass growth occurs at the base of the plant while many broadleaved weeds grow from the plants' terminal portions.

HEIGHT OF CUTTING

Correct mowing height largely depends upon the species of turfgrass. Following are the appropriate cutting heights of common lawn grasses:

Grass	*Cutting height*
Kentucky bluegrasses	1½ – 2 "
Red fescues	2 – 2½"
Ryegrasses	2 – 2½"
Tall fescues	2½ – 3 "

Cutting the grass too short weakens the turf and increases susceptibility to weed invasion, diseases, insect damage, and injury from drouth and temperature extremes. On the other hand, if the grass is cut too high, it often has a shaggy, nonuniform appearance that substantially detracts from the lawn's attractiveness.

Associated with cutting height is the frequency of mowing. As a general rule, you should not remove more than a third of the total foliage at any one mowing. For example, if the selected mowing height is 2 inches, the grass shouldn't be allowed to exceed 3 inches in height before it is mowed.

Removing more than a third of the foliage may cause effects similar to those associated with cutting the grass too short.

REMOVAL OF CLIPPINGS

It is not necessary to remove the clippings unless there are so many that they do not readily sift down into the turf when dry. This condition can generally be avoided if you mow often enough. However, if you do have large clumps of grass clippings, you should remove them to avoid smothering the turf and to prevent disease problems.

If clippings are not excessive, they are actually beneficial, because they return essential plant nutrients and organic matter to the soil.

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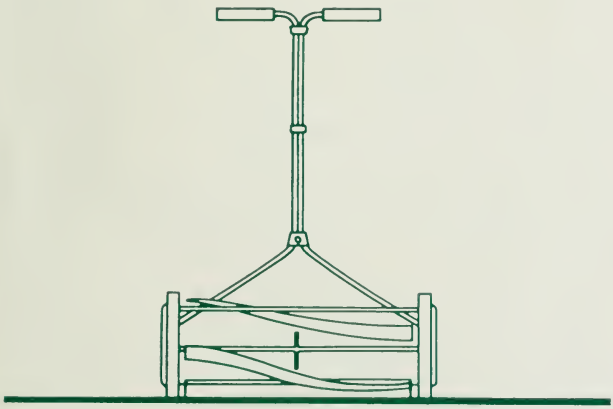
MOWING EQUIPMENT

There are two principal types of mowers for use on home lawns — the reel and the rotary.

Reel mowers cut with a scissors-like action and, if properly sharpened and adjusted, will give a high-quality cut. Improper adjustment results in a rippled or washboard appearance of the lawn. Upon close examination, the grass leaves may appear to be brown and stringy, with uneven tips. This effect may also result if the mower is dulled or if the cutting edge has been nicked by small stones or other debris.

The adjustment and sharpness of the cutting edges may be checked by the following procedure: (a) rotate the mower backwards until it rests on the handle; (b) place a strip of newspaper between the reel knife and bed knife; (c) *slowly* rotate the reel to cut the paper. The reel should rotate smoothly with very little pressure, cutting the paper cleanly. If the reel does not rotate smoothly or a clean cut is not obtained, follow the directions for adjusting the unit that are given on the instruction sheet provided with the mower. If you still have difficulty, have the mower sharpened and adjusted by a trained specialist.

The cutting height of the mower should be checked frequently. This may be done by standing the mower on a flat surface and measuring the distance between the surface and the upper edge of the bed knife with a small ruler. The cutting height may be changed by raising or lowering the castings that hold the roller at the rear of the unit.



Rotary mowers have become very popular because of their low cost and ease of handling. They are also very dangerous if not used properly. The rapid rotation of the rotary blade may project stones and other debris for long distances, injuring animals and humans as well as damaging property.

To prevent needless accidents, check for loose debris in the lawn before mowing. Keep fingers and toes well away from the underside of the rotary mower housing when the engine is running. A good safety precaution is to remove the spark plug wire from the spark plug after use and before making any adjustments on the mower.

Cutting height of rotary mowers is adjusted by devices that raise or lower the wheels. Place the mower on a flat surface and measure the height of the cutting blade from the surface. Raise or lower the wheels until the desired height is achieved.

Rotary blades should be removed and sharpened frequently to ensure a clean cut. A dull blade simply tears the grass leaves and may eventually cause a deterioration of turfgrass quality.

This circular was prepared by A. J. Turgeon, Assistant Professor of Turf Grass Management.

Urbana, Illinois February, 1972

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